

House Oversight Democrats continue their work to ensure efficient and effective government

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April 14, 2011 - Walker defends Wis. collective bargaining law, calls it "progressive"

Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker on Thursday defended the Wisconsin "budget repair" law stripping public workers of most of their collective bargaining rights, arguing that the legislation was "progressive, in the best sense of the word." Rep. Elijah Cummings (D-Md.) took aim at Walker's position on union rights, and argued that, contrary to the governor's statements, the recent legislation would hurt middle-class workers, not help them.

"I strongly oppose efforts to falsely blame middle-class American workers for these current economic problems," said Cummings, the ranking Democrat on the committee. "This recession was not caused by them. Working America - firefighters, teachers and nurses - are not responsible for the reckless actions of Wall Street, which led to this crisis in the first place."

Rep. Dennis Kucinich, an Ohio Democrat, challenged Walker on the how "repealing collective bargaining rights for public workers shows us anything about state debt." "Your proposal would require unions to hold annual votes to continue representing their own members," Kucinich said. "Can you please explain to me how much money this provision saves for your state budget?" "That particular part doesn't save any," Walker responded, after being pressed on the matter.

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THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

April 14, 2011 - Gov. Walker Gets Some Awkward Questions

□ Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker faced some awkward questions during his much-anticipated testimony Thursday before the House Oversight Committee.,Chairman Rep. Darrell Issa (R., Calif.) had intended the hearing to focus on state and municipal debt, but some Democratic lawmakers had other issues they wanted to air with the new Republican governor, who gained national attention with his effort to cut state costs by limiting collective bargaining for public employees.

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April 14, 2011 - Kucinich blasts Gov. Walker at Hill panel

In a House Oversight and Government Reform Committee hearing exploring state and municipal debt, Rep. Dennis Kucinich (D-OH) challenged Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker (R) to admit his legislative campaign aimed at stripping public employees' collective bargaining rights did nothing to help solve his state's budget deficit.

"If the unions agreed to the financial cuts you demand," Kucinich told Walker, "I don't understand how repealing collective bargaining rights for public workers shows us anything about state debt."

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April 14, 2011 - Hill Democrats Bash Walker for Wisconsin Union Law

Thursday's hearing before the House Oversight Committee was billed as a look at the tough budgetary choices states are facing, and who better to testify than Gov. Scott Walker, R-Wis. But, it was quickly apparent that most of the Democratic lawmakers on the Committee wanted to talk about something else entirely – namely Walker's controversial legislation that would limit public employees' collective bargaining power and require them to contribute more to their benefit plans. Ranking Member Rep. Elijah Cummings, D-Md., wasted no time.

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The New York Times

April 12, 2011 - Rules for Mortgage Servicers Are Criticized as Ineffective

Fourteen mortgage servicers have signed consent orders with the [Office of the Comptroller of the Currency](#) and other regulators, promising to improve their processing systems and to treat delinquent borrowers better. The agreements with the servicers, which include [Bank of America](#), [Wells Fargo](#), [JPMorgan Chase](#) and [GMAC](#), will be executed as early as this week.

Adding to the already widespread criticism of the measures, the ranking minority member of the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform formally asked regulators on Tuesday to put them off. Representative Elijah Cummings, a Democrat from Maryland, said in a letter to the comptroller's office that he was "deeply concerned" that the consent orders "would allow mortgage servicers to continue disregarding their legal and contractual obligations." Mr. Cummings said in an interview that he wanted the regulators to regroup and do a better job. A spokesman for the comptroller's office declined comment.

House Democratic members plan to introduce legislation on Wednesday that offers what they say is a better fix. The Preserving Homes and Communities Act of 2011, which was introduced

in the Senate last month, would require lenders to evaluate homeowners for modifications before initiating foreclosure, create an appeals process for those who are denied modifications, place limits on foreclosure-related fees and require servicers to prove they have the legal right to foreclose.

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March 31, 2011 - Republicans grill DHS officials on FOIA delays

House Republicans grilled senior officials from the Homeland Security Department on Thursday over the agency's now-rescinded practice of requiring secretive reviews by political advisers of hundreds of requests for government files under the Freedom of Information Act.

The top lawyer at the Homeland Security Department, Ivan Fong, said parts of the investigative report by congressional Republicans were "irresponsible" and made him indignant. The 153-page report accused the department of "administrative incompetence, illegal politicization and official obstruction."

Rep. Elijah Cummings, the top Democrat on the panel, cited results from an inquiry by the Homeland Security inspector general that found no evidence that political advisers prohibited federal records from being disclosed. The report also concluded that the advisers "had little to contribute" and caused unnecessary delays that violated deadlines under the law.

The department abandoned its practice of requiring approval by political appointees before information could be released after the AP investigated the program last year. Since July, political advisers have been afforded three business days to object to the release of information that otherwise could be withheld under nine narrow provisions in the law protecting national security, privacy or confidential decision-making. If there are no objections, the records can be released.

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March 31, 2011 - DHS, Dems fend off Oversight chairman's claims on info release

Tempers flared and accusations were hurled on Thursday at a House Oversight Committee hearing into whether the Obama administration allowed political appointees to block the release of information.

The department's chief privacy officer, Mary Ellen Callahan, testified that the privacy office had experienced management challenges over the past two years. But she said it had made significant headway on the backlog of Freedom Of Information Act requests and never allowed political appointees to restrict the release of information.

Rep. Elijah Cummings (Md.), the ranking Democrat on the panel, said Issa's "extreme accusations" were "unsubstantiated." He said that when Democratic staff reviewed the

thousands of documents and the six interviews the panel had gathered and conducted with DHS officials, “we found no evidence that DHS withheld any information for partisan political purposes.”

“Over and over again you claimed that DHS officials are making FOIA decisions based on partisan political considerations ... even though the committee has conducted interviews and gathered documents that show the opposite to be true,” Cummings said.

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The Washington Post

March 30, 2011 - House likely to approve D.C. school choice bill, but future in limbo

The House is expected to approve a bill Wednesday afternoon that would revive and expand the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program, as President Obama and House Speaker John Boehner (R-Ohio) stake out opposing sides on the school choice plan.

Under the program, which began in 2004, low-income District students are given federal money to help pay for private school tuition.

Democrats closed the program to new entrants in 2009. But Boehner’s bill – known as the SOAR Act – would reopen it, offering \$20 million annually for five years for new scholarships, along with another \$20 million apiece for D.C. charter schools and traditional D.C. public schools.

But Rep. Elijah Cummings (D-Md.), who will lead the opposition to the bill on the House floor, said the voucher program steers money to a tiny percentage of District students while ignoring the city school system's broader needs. The Washington Teachers Union opposes the measure for the same reason.

"Our highest priority must be to use limited taxpayer dollars to support programs that will truly meet all of our children's educational needs. This bill does not do that," Cummings said.

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